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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: GAMAL MUBARAK: CONCENTRATING ON RULING PARTY AS
HIS VEHICLE TO THE PRESIDENCY

REF: A. 2006 CAIRO 2010

[1](#)B. CAIRO 1417

[1](#)C. CAIRO 2577

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Over the past several months, presidential son and National Democratic Party (NDP) assistant secretary general Gamal Mubarak has focused his energies on re-vitalizing the party. With no military background to draw on as his power base (the army being the traditional source of Egypt's presidents), Gamal appears to be increasingly turning to the NDP machinery, and away from his reform platform, as the legitimizing vehicle for his presidential aspirations. End summary.

"PRESIDENT GAMAL" SEEMS INEVITABLE TO MANY

[1](#)2. (C) Despite Gamal Mubarak's continued public insistence that he is not interested in following in his father's footsteps to the Egyptian presidency, there is an increased grudging acceptance about the "inevitability" of his succeeding his father, both among Cairo's political cognoscenti, as well as from the proverbial "man on the street." Contacts who two years ago were telling us Gamal is "not the right guy" are now opining, "he is not the right guy, but there is nothing we can do about it." Many among Egypt's business elite seem to have concluded that not only is Gamal's ascension an unstoppable force, but that it would serve their business and political interests. In their analysis, Gamal would likely maintain the status quo favorable to them. While others across the spectrum of the political opposition find the notion of Gamal's succession objectionable, they are becoming gradually more resigned to it, "unless the military steps in with a candidate." While Gamal remains unpopular on the Egyptian "street," the apparent lack of other contenders make even his critics increasingly reconciled to the likelihood that he will one day be Egypt's president.

GAMAL FOCUSED ON REVITALIZING
RULING PARTY

[1](#)3. (C) In the past year, Gamal has focused his attention on the NDP. Taking a far more active and prominent role than the other two assistant secretary generals of the party (Zakaria Azmy, the President's de-facto Chief of Staff, and old-guard cabinet veteran Mufeed Shehab), Gamal and his allies recently spearheaded an unprecedented series of internal elections within the organization. NDP secretary-general Safwat El Sherif recently told journalists

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that the elections resulted in enormous turnover within NDP leadership ranks, stating that at the village and district levels, "almost 50 percent of the leaders are new." "We have seen the emergence of a new generation of leaders committed to the NDP's new style of thinking," he added. Many Cairene observers doubt the legitimacy of the elections. Our observation of one electoral contest featuring abysmal turnout raises serious questions. Nevertheless, the elections are a clear step aimed at re-energizing the party, and demonstrating, through supposed participation across the country, its grass-roots legitimacy. The elections were organized and controlled by Gamal's coterie in the NDP, led by steel magnate and NDP secretary for organization Ahmed Ezz.

14. (C) Following the announcement this summer that, for the first time in the NDP's 29-year history, the party's president will be elected, at the party conference in November, speculation abounded that President Mubarak would be replaced as party chief (ref C). However, NDP officials recently assured us that the NDP's top two leaders will not be changed - Mubarak will remain as the party's president, and Safwat El Sherif as secretary-general. Gamal and his inner circle now appear to be angling for the appointment of Gamal loyalists in less senior positions throughout the party apparatus. Through the party elections, Gamal has also consolidated his position within the NDP, driving out a significant chunk of the calcified old guard at local levels, and bringing on board new faces with presumed loyalty to him.

NDP AS GAMAL'S POWER BASE ...

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15. (C) With no military background to draw on as his power base, Gamal increasingly seems to be turning to the NDP as the legitimizing vehicle for his presidential aspirations. This apparent focus on the NDP as the means to create the pretext of popular support for Gamal contrasts markedly with his approach in past years of casting himself as a liberalizing reformer. Egypt's reform agenda now appears to be solidly on the back burner, and Gamal himself seems to have backed away from it, leaving technocratic ministers to spearhead domestically controversial economic reform initiatives. As for the limited political reforms that have been undertaken over the past year, such as the 34 amendments to Egypt's constitution approved in March, they appear to be designed largely to ensure the continuation of the status quo, and engineer Gamal's own ascension.

... BUT CAN THE PARTY MAKE HIM POPULAR?

16. (C) Gamal's heightened focus on the NDP seems to have had a largely positive effect on the party as an institution. Overall, it appears more energized than in recent years. One opposition MP recently noted to us the NDP's increased effectiveness at dispensing patronage and extracting loyalty. He highlighted the NDP's heightened ability to deny business opportunities to non-party members in his countryside district. While other contacts still view the NDP as a "paper tiger," and a "political party in name only," it appears that, with Gamal's encouragement, the NDP now has at least the trappings of a "real" political party, with a Cairo election operation center staffed by hundreds of young party operatives calling out to their counterparts nationwide, membership drives, glossy posters spread throughout the country with the slogan, "The Door is Open," and plans afoot for an enormous party conference November 3-5. The facade is thin. But the party is clearly aiming to project more grassroots appeal and enhance its credibility, which will

reflect on Gamal when the presidential succession ultimately occurs.

17. (C) Significant numbers of Egyptians see the NDP and the Mubarak regime as one and the same. They regard the party as tainted with the abuses, excesses and corruption of the government. Gamal and his team have learned from the NDP's failures in the 2005 and 2006 elections, and seem to have recognized that they need to "re-brand" the party with the Egyptian people. But it is not clear that they can successfully do so. Gamal's attempt to achieve populist appeal via the NDP may thus be fated to founder. Ultimately, in the event of a presidential election (which Egypt's constitution calls for should the president die or be permanently incapacitated), Gamal's actual popularity will not really matter, given the inevitable government interference and manipulation of election results, as well as the limited pool of candidates that would be allowed due to constitutional restrictions. If Gamal is the NDP's candidate, and there is no military coup or other extra-constitutional succession, then he will be president. But he recognizes that he needs the party for continued legitimacy.

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